



# CADWYN



ALL WALES CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

## HOW BUSINESS-LIKE ARE WE?

For many years, schools have been urged to adopt a more business-like approach to management and governance. In this article, *Tom Whyatt* considers the similarities and differences between school governing bodies and company boards of directors. Tom is the Managing Director of Continental Teves, who this year will make five million brake calipers for cars at their Ebbw Vale factory (600 employees). He has been Vice-Chair of governors of a comprehensive school and Chair at a primary.

“There are many different types of company boards but probably *the first difference you would notice between governing bodies and boards of directors is the split between executive and non-executive members.* At Continental Teves, for instance, the majority of directors are “executive” and actually work at the factory, “non-executive” directors are a small minority – the exact opposite of schools where usually only the Head, and teacher and staff governors work at the school. The executive directors are the Managing Director and the Heads of the main departments: Manufacturing, Finance, Purchasing, etc. and, obviously, as well as long term planning, they are responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation. The non-executive directors are much more like the majority of school governors. They normally don’t get involved in the daily running of the business, but they monitor performance, provide wider experience to assist in longer term strategic planning and become involved in areas of special interest or aptitude.

We hold full directors’ board meetings once a month where we focus on broad policy issues and items of current interest as well as detailed performance.



Continental Teves, Ebbw Vale



Tom Whyatt

Detailed performance would include profitability, turnover, quality, health and safety, training and environmental control (Conti Teves in 2000 were the overall winners of the Wales Environment Award), etc. This is similar to the Head’s report and committee reports to the governing body, though it’s more difficult for a Head to

report regularly on performance as a number of performance indicators for a school (such as examination results, pupil destinations, etc.) occur only once a year, whereas figures for sales etc. can be produced instantly.

Outside of the main monthly meetings, executive directors chair meetings on a whole raft of issues: are we on the right lines, is policy being followed, are milestones being met?

**Management norms** whether in a school or a company are the same – having a vision, setting objectives, establishing clear accountability, defining specific measureables and monitoring progress through a wide variety of means.

**Neither directors nor governors can possibly be involved in everything** that’s happening in a company or school, nor should they be; once the detailed objectives have been identified the people working for them have to be left alone to fulfil them. Performance indicators and other feedback will indicate how well they are doing.

Another major difference is that **directors** of a company **undergo a rigorous selection process** and are normally specialists in their field. A board of governors on the other hand, whilst having some full-time professionals, is a disparate group of people, mainly volunteers, who are being asked to work together as a team and are expected to monitor progress and provide direction. Governors may be recruited for their particular expertise e.g. co-opted, but may also be part of an interest group e.g. parents or LEA. They obviously require a sound understanding of broad educational and other issues affecting the school (but not day-to-day management – that’s the province of the Head, Deputies and their team). **Training is vital** if governors are to be able to discharge their duties effectively.

Continued overleaf



## HOW BUSINESS-LIKE ARE WE? Continued

Amongst the factors influencing how well the team performs is **the relationship between the Chair of Governors and the Head**, the leadership they provide and team-working ethos they generate. The same applies between a Chairman and a Managing Director.

Interestingly, and this is very different from the practice in schools, individual directors or their departmental managers being asked to 'deliver the goods' are normally responsible for the selection of their staff, although at Conti Teves the Managing Director retains a right of veto in the selection of those reporting directly to a director. In schools, as in industry, staff are key. **It seems incongruous, therefore, that the Head is but one of many on a selection panel and yet is the one really accountable.**

In addition to our monthly meetings we have several off-site board meetings every year and at these we concentrate on strategic planning. These meetings are very important in determining our long-term aims and our strategy for achieving them.

There are many similarities between boards of directors and governors, and they can learn from one another.

The emphasis that directors place on **strategic planning** is crucial and clarifies long-term objectives; governors perhaps could take more from this approach. Governors should consider establishing **broader performance indicators which they think are appropriate for their school**, in addition to such things as examination results. Such indicators might include improvement of the school environment, absentee levels of pupils and staff, sporting achievements, level of extra curricular activities, study clubs, and many more. In addition, companies are increasingly benchmarking themselves – how do we square up against others in the same field?

One important lesson boards of directors can learn from governing bodies is greater use of non-executive directors. Governors can bring a wide range of experience to a school, and some schools have tapped into this resource well. Non-executive directors have a similar potential for broadening the vision for a company, especially in strategic planning, and there is a case for expanding their use.

Working as a unit, an enlightened board of directors can transform a company. The same can be true of the board of governors and management of a school."

## From The Project Director



Our most recent development at the Centre has been the first step in setting up a resource base for governors at the Department of Education library here at the University of Wales Swansea. In future issues of **Cadwyn**, we'll be giving details of the materials available to governors, and how to access them.

My visits to address Governors Associations continue, and I'd like to thank the Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Merioneth, Torfaen and Pembrokeshire groups who have made my talks with them so enjoyable.

Finally, on the research side, we are currently undertaking a survey on the provision of Special Educational Needs for school governors, for the National Assembly of Wales.

Steve Gullick

Llywodraethwyr Cymru

Governors Wales

## Governors' Helpline

Telephone: 0845 602 0100

is the new helpline for governors of schools in Wales.

Operated by Governors Wales the helpline will provide advice on a range of issues to governors in all parts of Wales.

## Your Opinions Count

We welcome your comments, opinions and suggestions, and should be glad to publish them in future editions of this Newsletter. Please send them to:

All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor  
Training and Research  
Department of Education • University of Wales  
Swansea • Hendrefoelan • SWANSEA • SA2 7NB



## Sharing the Challenge



Peter Griffin OBE *Chair of Governors Wales*

**Since its inception in March 2000, the All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor Training and Research has worked closely with Governors Wales to raise awareness of the importance of the work of school governors and to provide support for their development. In this article, the Chair of Governors Wales, Peter Griffin OBE, describes Governors Wales' ongoing commitment to improving school governance.**

“Some three years ago Governors Wales published a memorandum, specifically directed at the need for a radical new approach to Governor training. The memorandum referred to our conviction ‘that a new culture of governor training must be inculcated amongst both serving and potential governors of schools in Wales’. Further, we proposed that ‘standards of quality should be laid down and designed and implemented with appropriate systems of monitoring and quality assurance’. Bearing in mind the simple fact that virtually all governor training is devised and delivered by each LEA, we expressed our belief that governors should have the opportunity to “access sources of independent information, advice and guidance”.

What we were seeking, in effect, was the transformation of existing systems of governor training that, in our view, frequently missed the single most important target; that is, the improvement in effectiveness of school governance to levels which matched the increasing responsibilities of school governing bodies. We remain unconvinced that a relatively small number of individual governors, attending the occasional course, arranged to address a currently topical subject, such as ‘School exclusions’, or

‘The School Development Plan’, necessarily advance the way in which a whole Governing body approaches the important matter of school improvement, in a systematic and confident manner.

To be sure this implies that fundamental questions must be posed and answered. Is there, for example, general acceptance that Governing body responsibilities require knowledge and skills that can only be acquired through training? Would training be best delivered to whole Governing bodies rather than to individual governors? Those two questions alone have very considerable implications for change, including a requirement that serving governors would willingly accept the need for regular training and be equally willing participants in training opportunities provided for them.

There can be no doubt that the launch of the Swansea initiative represented the awareness of the National Assembly of the need for something to happen; for a new commitment to the support, training and personal development of governors of schools in Wales. In our different ways, the Centre of Excellence and Governors Wales, working together, can make things happen. We share the same objectives - to bring fresh thinking and practical ideas to the complex task of improving school governance. We look forward to that joint endeavour, working with the LEAs, raising performance and, with it, the public esteem of school governors.”

### HEADTEACHERS AND GOVERNING BODY TRAINING

Research carried out at the Centre shows that Headteachers regard governor training as very important if governors are to carry out their duties effectively. In fact, Heads themselves are regular attenders at training events with over 70% of our respondents attending governor training sessions every year.

The majority of Heads preferred traditional evening training sessions as opposed to the 22% who would choose half-day events. Perhaps this preference is linked to the increasing popularity with Heads for whole or individual governing body training. 65% of our respondents said that they supported the idea of whole governing body training.

This interest in whole governing body training and the saving of governors' time which it brings also reflects the feelings expressed by a number of Heads about the dangers of overburdening governors. They refer to the voluntary nature of school governance and the additional demands that training may impose.

In spite of the perceived problems, though, it is clear that Headteachers in Wales have a very positive attitude to governor training and its values.



## Conversations

*The second in our "Conversations" between Centre Director Steve Gullick and representatives of the education community is with Andrew Jenkins. Andrew has been the Chair of Governors of an urban 11-16 mixed comprehensive school of 800 pupils for the last seven years.*

**SG** What do you think are the most important jobs for the Chair of a Governing body, Andrew?

**AJ** In the first place, the Chairperson has to be able to chair meetings effectively. After all, the full governing body meetings are the core activity for governors, so meetings must be purposeful and cover the business in hand fully.

Secondly, the relationship between the Chair and Head is crucial if the school is to be successful. It is essential that neither person should see the other as a threat. This is particularly important when the Head needs to sound out ideas on the Chair and wants a truthful response.

Thirdly, dealing with discipline issues, especially permanent exclusions, is a very demanding job. The Chair has to ensure that every procedure is carried out correctly, and chairing a permanent exclusion committee has to be carried out with great sensitivity. I'm glad we don't have too many of those!

**SG** You've said that chairing meetings effectively is important. At governing body meetings, how do you ensure everyone participates, but no one dominates?

**AJ** I don't want to sound bossy, but the Chairperson has to be in control. First of all, I set boundaries: meetings always start on time and I rarely allow them to last longer than 1½ hours. That's why we rarely have Any Other Business at meetings unless it's an important issue which can't wait until the next meeting. Having said that, I believe meetings should be enjoyable so I always try to inject some humour into the proceedings, and do my best to make people feel comfortable. I think this is vital as governors' input is likely to be better if they do not feel inhibited by a stuffy atmosphere. During a meeting I try to ensure that all areas (parents, teachers, LEA, etc) have an input to discussion by actually asking at least one representative from that area to speak. Interestingly, after a few meetings this happens less and less as governors become more confident about giving their opinion. Of course, there are always one or two people who are naturally reserved so, although I try to include them, I don't "push" them.

Stopping a person dominating is more difficult. I usually say something like, "thanks for what you've said, but we really need to hear what John or Mary's view is." I remember being rather assertive on one occasion and having to see the governor concerned after the meeting to explain why we'd had to move on. It's the same when dealing with an issue. Obviously it's necessary to discuss something fully but it's important to finish discussion when everyone has had their say and there's nothing new to add.

**SG** How often do you speak with the Headteacher?

**AJ** We probably speak to each other weekly, though this is not a strict rule because I know the Head will contact me when he thinks it's necessary, just as I do with him. Of course, I've been Chair for seven years and this has meant a good understanding and working relationship has developed between the Head and me so we probably don't feel the need to speak to each other as often as when we were starting out.

**SG** What do you like best and dislike most about being the Chairperson?

**AJ** The thing I enjoy most is full governing body meetings. I love feeling part of a team and helping to get things done for the school. I also get a certain satisfaction from exclusion meetings. Don't misunderstand me on this. I hate the fact that we have to exclude a pupil, but I feel that I am able to perform this unpleasant job efficiently, and I'm also helping to share some of the burden with the Head.

I dislike most the figurehead role of a Chair of Governors. I think success is a team effort so I don't really enjoy being centre-stage, as it were, at school events.

**SG** Finally, Andrew, what contribution do you think the governing body has made to your school's noticeable improvement in the last few years?

**AJ** We see ourselves very much as part of the overall management team, although we don't get involved with the day to day running of the school. Rather we act as a sounding board for ideas. We also do our best to ensure the senior management team is accountable for its actions and is procedurally and legally correct when dealing with things like health and safety. Finally, we are proud of our school and make sure that it's presented in the best possible light to whomever we meet.

## CONTACT US ...

... for more information on the Centre and its activities, or with any comments you wish to make – we should be very pleased to hear from you.

**All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor Training and Research**

Department of Education, University of Wales Swansea, Hendrefoelan, SWANSEA SA2 7NB

Tel: 01792 518609 / 518610 Fax: 01792 290219

Email: [S.E.Gullick@swan.ac.uk](mailto:S.E.Gullick@swan.ac.uk) or [K.J.Evans@swan.ac.uk](mailto:K.J.Evans@swan.ac.uk)

[www.swan.ac.uk/education/research/governor.htm](http://www.swan.ac.uk/education/research/governor.htm)